

Pamphlet
Bib. Lit
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A Word

for the

Present Crisis

by the late

Dr. Joseph Parker

of the City Temple

London

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BY THE LATE REV. DR. PARKER,
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At a meeting of the Free Church Council in England, the message of the President, Rev. Dr. Joseph Parker, was in part as follows:

We were brought up amongst simple, unsuspecting believers. They told us that the Bible was all true. They called it the Holy Bible, and they held it to be such. They told us that Eden was a real place, with real trees, and a real serpent. They told us that a four-branched river rolled through the sunny paradise; we thought that Adam bathed in Hiddekel, and that the gold that coloured the Pison stream was solid and yellow. We never doubted it. The place on the map was pointed out, with the assurance that if Eden was not there it was thereabouts. Some people believe this still. The Salvation Army believes it. Some Primitive Methodists believe it; Spurgeon believed it. In its highest, deepest, grandest meaning I myself believe it.

Our mothers are responsible for a good deal. They were not literal grammarians, but they

were gigantic believers. They used to read to us the story of Joseph and cry over it, and made much of the coat of many colors, and when we came to "your father, the old man of whom ye spake, is he well?" our brawny fathers sobbed and pretended to be only coughing. If anybody had told us then what some people tell us now, that there was no Joseph—no old man—no coat of many colors—no life in Egypt—no forgiven brethren—no family reconciliation, that it is all a dream, a fantasy, an illusion in color, I know not in what terms he would have been denounced and with what horror he would have been shunned. Some of us still believe in the history of Joseph; and when all other stories have run out, this story of Joseph will exact its tribute of tears from the eyes of far-off generations.

Then in this matter of credulity our quaint old pastors were little better than our mothers. If some modern criticism is true, those old pastors were unconscious impostors. They read the Bible and actually believed it, and preached it without a stammer. They used to preach about Daniel and the lions' den, and make us feel heroic in the heroism of the brave young man. Now it turns out that there were no lions, there was no den, and worst of all, there was no Daniel. The Book of Daniel is taken away

bodily. Yet we are told that the Bible has been given back to us by the critics, and that it is a better book than we had before. Some of us cannot yet receive this saying. At present we are suffering from a grievous sense of loss.

Do not suppose, however, that all the higher critics are of one mind, or that they all pursue one method, and do not suppose that every minister has given up Joseph and his brethren, or even Daniel and the lions' den.

Broad and indiscriminate statements are apt to be untrue and unjust on all sides of great controversies.

Our dear old pastors used to preach about David, and quoting, call him the "sweet singer of Israel," and now according to some it turns out that David was no singer at all, and that he probably never heard of the Psalms which he is supposed to have written. Still more widespread is the havoc made by some ruthless sickles. It is bad enough to lose Joseph and his brethren, Daniel and his den, David and his harp, Jonah and his whale, but these are comparative trifles.

There was, according to some, no miraculous conception, no ministry of miracles, no resurrection of Christ.—All is idealism, poetry, dream, and hazy myth. Bethlehem and Nazar-

eth disappear from what we used to call the sacred page.

In the old, old times when we were young the Christian Church had a heaven and a hell, an immortal soul, a direct revelation from heaven, a book which it called "the Word of God."

In those early days we thought that Christians who died went to be "forever with the Lord." We said in a sob, which was really a song, "They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more, neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. The Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them and lead them unto living fountains of water, and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes." We said that each of them had a crown, a harp, and a white robe. Now we are told that all we supposed to be real was but fancy, mirage, and "the stuff that dreams are made of."

Now I want you to see that if we yielded to these suggestions and demands we should be giving up a good deal. Do not suppose that it is easy for the soul to part with its very self—with all the things which would leave only emptiness and mocking echoes behind. We were sad when we saw the Bible thus depleted. We had really loved the Bible. It was literally everything to us. So when it seemed to go from us piece by piece, our hearts were grieved

and our prospect was a great, all-covering cloud. When we were asked why we were so sad we could not easily refrain from saying—each for himself, “Why should not my countenance be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers’ sepulchres, lieth waste, and the gates thereof are burned with fire?”

We had so much, so very much, to give up. Some of us have not even yet given up our faith. Blessed be God, some of us still believe in the whole Bible. We know that translation may have its faults, and that copyists may make blunders, and yet we hold to the whole book—we still call it the Holy Bible—it is to us in substance and in effect the veritable Word of God. And so-called higher criticism is not, however, of the same quality. There are higher critics and higher critics. Some of them are as lovingly Biblical as the best of us, and we thank them for all their noble and most useful service.

Yes, we have been asked to give up a good deal, and what, as I have already said, aggravates us most of all, is that we have been asked to believe that the giving of it up has made the Bible more precious than ever to us.

Genesis turns out to be mainly fable. Abram is not a man, but an “eponyman’s hero”; Joseph “is not” in a deeper and wider sense;

Shadrach, Meshech and Abednego are mere dreams and nightmares; the books of Kings and Chronicles are removed bodily; Ecclesiastes and Solomon's Song ought never to have been in the Bible; yet, notwithstanding all this, we are to think of the Bible being "given back" to us more precious than ever. We cannot do so all at once. Our training blocks the way. Early impressions are often indelible. It is hard to regard supposed enemies as all at once our disguised friends.

For example, many of us were brought up to believe that Tom Paine was an awful character—nothing short of an infidel, blatant, presumptuous, defiant. Tom Paine was a kind of moral typhus, or a malignant form of smallpox. Every man who had a copy of his "Age of Reason" kept it in a secret drawer and lent it at night time and under whispered vow of secrecy. To possess the "Age of Reason" was equal to having an infectious and loathsome disease. Bishop Watson answered "The Age of Reason," but the Bishop is now nowhere. Tom Paine's "soul goes marching on," but the Bishop is forgotten as if his book were a mere escape of gas. Tom Paine showed wonderful insight, and in a manner anticipated all the higher critics.*

* 47,000 copies of the "Age of Reason" were sold in the United States last year.

For example, Tom Paine said, "Whoever wrote the Pentateuch, Moses had little or nothing to do with it." But some who say this very thing have orthodox chairs in English universities, and sign even more articles than thirty-nine, whilst Tom Paine is branded as an infidel and had no professional income. Tom Paine said there were at least two Isaiahs, in other words, that the Isaiah who wrote the first part of the book never wrote the second, and perhaps never knew that a second part was written. Some higher critics say the very same thing to-day, whilst Tom Paine is still regarded by orthodoxy as a most noxious beast. Poor Bishop Watson is treated as an evangelical milksop, whilst Tom Paine is regarded as a man of progress and of advanced and modern thought. Still we are told that Tom and his successors have given us "back" the Bible, and that it is now more precious than ever. It is not for me to revile Tom Paine; but I take it upon myself to say that no Tom Paine, notwithstanding all his insight and foresight, ought to be in any Free Church pulpit, and if Tom Paine is there we ought to eject and denounce him as a man who is making a living under false pretences.

It is not to be wondered at that some of us still cling to the Bible after the illiterate and

traditional manner of our fathers and mothers and pastors. Blame our training. Take full account of our antecedents. We drew in our love of the Bible with our mother's milk. The Bible helped some of us when the father died, and there was neither coal in the grate nor bread in the cupboard. It sanctified our poverty, our struggles, our desolation. It turned the grave into a garden plot. It put heart into us when all other things failed. The Bible has made us men. We are not to be told that this consolatory (not critical) Bible is still left to us. How long will it be? Still higher critics may possibly rise in years to come who will purloin this jewel also.

Who can say how much of the Bible will be left in half a century? We have a right to be suspicious. Where much has gone, more may go. On the whole, therefore, I am of opinion that it is better to hold the Bible very much as we have always held it, to keep an open mind in relation to all competent and reverent criticism, to cling to the Bible in all its proved consolations and particular results, and to leave many difficulties and perplexities to be settled when in heaven we have more time and more light.

